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SERMON DXLVIII.

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RELIGION OF THE HEART AND OF THE LIFE.

"I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end."—
PSALM 119: 112.

It is impossible to compress a truth with all its qualifications and explanations into one short sentence. The Psalmist here speaks of what *he* had done in order to secure his own obedience to God, and leaves out of sight for the time what *God* had done. He thinks of his state of mind, and of his own agency in its existence, without thinking of the agency of God which went before and enabled him to act. He might have said with equal truth, "*Thou* hast inclined my heart," and "*I* have inclined my heart;" for the one prepared the way for the other.

There was a time, however, in the life of the godly man when he could not have used this language, "I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes." He felt the binding force of the spiritual law, but he found himself to be carnal, sold under sin. And this bondage was a bondage of his will; such a bondage that the occasional longings which he felt to escape from it were powerless, and his struggles to do right were without fruit. From these efforts of his unassisted nature to turn the current of his own will he discovers his weakness, as well as the misery of being in thralldom to sin. And when he finds that this bondage of his will to sin has been removed, experience has taught him that he did not make himself willing, that a mightier than he broke the chain of his captivity. He

now cries out to God, "Thou hast inclined my heart to perform thy statutes; thou hast worked in me to will and to do of thy good pleasure."

Thus the original inclination of his heart to obedience comes from God, as he feels and owns with gratitude. He has therefore become possessed of a new moving power; and just as a lame man when cured by a physician may say, "I walk," or "I run," so may he say, when he contemplates his efforts to be obedient after his conversion, "I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes." Nor can he ever lose sight of the cause which has rectified his will and has imparted to him this new power, any more than the lame man can attribute to himself the recovery from his infirmity. But there is this difference between the lame man and him. The former can go about without the physician, and perhaps will never need to call for his aid again during life. It is a *past* fact, and it may be an *isolated* fact in his history that a strength beyond his own gave him the use of a lost power. But it is not true that the godly man can incline his heart to perform the statutes without the aid of God. And whether this continual aid of God is necessary to sustain his new nature because of its *weakness* in the state of trial on earth, or whether—what is more probable—no finite being, man or angel, *can go alone* upon a path of virtue, but the security of all must consist in their taking hold of God's arm—whencesoever this necessity arises, it is *real*, and found to be real in his constant experience. If he thinks to say, "I can incline my heart to perform thy statutes," because at one time in my history thou madest me inclined by thy power, such a feeling, which cuts the cord binding him to a *present* God, is the prelude to a fall. When therefore he uses language like that in the text respecting what he has done or can do, it is always used with the tacit understanding that a supply of power for such exertions of his own comes from the Omnipotent fountain. He is now like a man who has no money of his own, but is allowed to use the name of a rich friend to an unlimited extent. He can say, without the least shadow of boasting or self-confidence, "I will engage in such and such a transaction involving very large liabilities;" he shrinks from no outlay because it is vast, and calls the operation his own; knowing all the while that he is nothing but a poor man sustained by the unfailing capital of another. And the good man is often found to have such a confidence in the strength of an ever-present God, that he is not afraid to calculate upon the future, and to affirm what his conduct will be in certain contingencies where he may be exposed to trial. He says, "I can do all things," but he always adds, if not in word at least in thought, "through Christ Jesus which strengtheneth me."

Thus the power of the Christian to sway his own will always implies a co-operation of the Divine Spirit and himself. What he does, as his part of the labor, consists not in simple desiring or longing, however intense. There is no inclining his heart by the simple will to incline it. That is not consistent with the nature of a rational being, and lies beyond the reach of finite power. In order to do what the Psalmist speaks of in the text, hard work upon himself must have gone before. He must have brought the truth of God before his reason, his conscience, and his feelings; he must have roused his sluggish soul, as he would rouse a sleeper amid the flames; he must have meditated long enough upon the Divine Word to have it exclude other thoughts, and occupy his soul. When after such efforts he finds his heart roused into an inclination or tendency towards obedience, he can very truly say, "I have inclined my heart," because his actings were the cause without which the inclination would not have taken place. But he knows full well that these labors would not be crowned with success without the presence of a higher cause in its fulness of power.

From these first reflections suggested by the text we pass on to the remark that it is his *heart* which the Christian inclines, or bends to the performance of duty. Not merely his choice, taking all things into view, moves in that direction; not merely his conscience; but his heart, as including all the free and glad movements of his nature. *This* indeed is admitted in all our systems of theology, and in all our treatises upon religious experience, that a religion without affections is worth nothing; but after all we need to feel how important the affections are for the elevation of Christian character as well as for its enjoyment. Although Christianity at the root is alike in all, there may be said to be two sorts of Christians: one class to a great degree contemplate the life of the soul as a series of duties, and are controlled by the feeling of obligation; the other class regard the essence of religion as lying in feeling towards God, which they seek to arouse by acts of meditation and worship. It is obvious that the habits of thinking of both classes are attended with peculiar dangers. The one class is liable to slide down to a dead routine of duties, and their religious life scarcely rises higher, as it sometimes appears, than that of the moralist who frets and chafes at the restraints of obligation. The other class is peculiarly prone to self-deception, and when sincere, is apt to be satisfied with the deliciousness of religious emotion without going farther. But still, supposing the men of both these types to be real followers of Christ, I have no hesitation in saying that the man *with a heart* has risen to a higher level than the man *with a conscience*. For it is quite possible that the *conscience* shall recognize a moral law without

taking into full view the living, personal Law-giver. We are in great danger, when we act from a sense of duty, of living amid abstractions; of separating in thought the part we have to act in the world from the great Author of the natural and moral system. It seems as if there would be duties and rights, were there no moral Governor of the universe. *Thus* such a principle of action *does not bind us to the throne of God*, but rather, taking a lower aim, attaches us to the rules and laws which he upholds. The affections, on the contrary, bring us into direct communion with God himself, and lend the aid derived from love of the Law-giver to the satisfaction which our moral nature takes in the law, which emanates from his character. If there could be two persons, one of whom had love without the sense of duty, and the other the sense of duty without a capacity for love, the latter could be only a laborious moralist, while the former, even without the feeling of right, could do what is right out of regard to the God whom he loves. This latter supposition indeed can never be true in matter of fact. There never was a being made without a sense of right and without conscience. Much more then, when this property is present in the soul, will the man who loves act so as to please God.

There is a lamentable defect in such Christianity as is without emotion. After allowing for differences of temperament, we cannot but feel that the little of heart manifest in religion, compared with the amount of moral feeling, argues a low state of the religious principle in the soul. We are too far off from a personal God and a personal Saviour, and therefore life circulates feebly through us, as through the extremities of the body. We bend our purposes to do right; we run into a thousand schemes having the benefit of man in view, but the heart scarcely beats. Our religion rather enables us to do good in this world than prepares us for the employments of the celestial home where God is the centre of all affections.

And this fact, that we not enough *incline our hearts*, renders our characters also unattractive. That man, certainly, who acts from impulse and uncalculating generosity, is not much to be commended; and yet all men love to look upon such exhibitions of character. This common suffrage is testimony in favor of the emotions and of their occupying a prominent place in the character. They are more strictly personal than any thing else which belongs to man. They reach forth towards persons, and they arrest the regards of persons. If then our Christian life is to be lovely, it must have a large measure of heart in it. We must love God and man to such a degree that the province of duty may be to restrain us from pouring ourselves out, so to speak, upon other beings—from overlooking our own valuable interests in our zeal for what is foreign to ourselves. The heart

must not only be a moving force, but a very strong moving force, the wind which fills the sails; while reason and conscience ought to be like the man at the bowsprit and the man at the helm of the vessel.

The Psalmist proceeds to inform us of the point towards which he bends his affections. "I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes." His affections do not find their gratification simply in meditating on God or on his Word; but they pass beyond the regions of contemplation into those of practice. The philosopher, who vainly aims to purify himself by lofty thought and by intimacy with elevating objects, may stop short of this; he may incline his reason or discursive faculty to reject the gross materials of thinking on which the mass of minds feed; but the result of all this is nothing more than that the habit of meditation becomes stronger the longer it lasts. His soul is not purified from selfish affections, nor drawn to God—the centre of obedience, and the source of activity to virtuous minds. He is rather rendered more selfish by his habits of philosophical meditation; for he finds them so much pleasanter and easier than the hard work of active self-sacrifice, that it is next to impossible to arouse him from his sluggish inactivity. Thus there is no performance, *no action* in his system, which begins and ends with speculation.

Nor again does the godly man stop at inclining his heart to *desire* to perform the statutes of God. This is the limit which many reach; and this the highest attainment of their lives, *to long* to be good, to wish that they were obedient without being so. There is so much intrinsic beauty in such a character, and there is of necessity so much dissatisfaction with a life of sin, that the heart while yet unrenewed, without turning from sin, turns in eager longings towards a holier and better life. But still the man stays long, perhaps for ever, in his state of sin, drawing encouragement, it may be, from these very longings, that it is not with him as with other men, yet never ripening them into the fruits of effectual resolve. He is like a man lost in thick darkness amid the wilds, and seeing a light afar: inclined to go in that direction; and yet never performing the journey lest there should be swamps or pitfalls between him and the light.

Actual obedience is the proof to which we must come at last, in our own case, as well as in that of others, of the sincerity of our religion. There is no real inclination of heart towards God which fails of securing the performance of his statutes. The evidence of true piety is a life of holiness and usefulness, springing forth from a heart where God is enthroned. And, without this evidence, we must decide that the law of Christ, as a system of practice, is rejected by the soul.

That which the godly man's heart is inclined to perform is denoted by the term, *thy statutes*. On these words we remark, in the first place, that the Psalmist does not describe his state of mind as an inclination to *do right* simply; he does not say that, smitten with a love and admiration of virtue, he resolves on a life conformable to her dictates. No! his soul is not dried up by contemplating abstract law, or an ideal standard of character. A present personal God is the source from which he draws the motives and the rules of his obedience. The soul that is saved has returned in reconciliation and love to the God of the Bible, not to abstract rectitude, to Stoical or Platonic perfection. It is a higher reason, with such a soul, for performing the statutes, *that they are God's*, than *that they are right*. And the statutes are right, in its estimation, not chiefly because they commend themselves to the reason, but because they emanate from a God whom it trusts.

We remark, *once more*, on these words, *thy statutes*, that the will of God presents itself to the mind under the form of fixed, unchangeable morality; for *statutes* are something not arbitrary or varying with caprice, but settled law, built on a lasting foundation. If, indeed, God's will, without giving forth a general law, whispered to the soul, in each particular case, what to do and what to shun, the spirit of a child would rejoice in such communion with its all-wise Father. But, since this is not the kind of intercourse kept up between God and the soul, since general rules are given to it, to try its fidelity in special applications of them, and to suit its freedom and powers of thought, it rejoices that the nature of God has stamped his immutability upon his law. These statutes change not, like human ones, through experience of their defects, or because a new law-giver has come into power; but, drawing their nature from God, who alters not, and from the permanent nature of man, they continue as the days of heaven. And as their substance is, so also is their form, as it appeared in the written Word, which is the fixed code for man and for earth. Opinion varies; practices condemned in one age are praised in the next; the standard of character, even in the Christian Church, is for ever shifting. If God's will was to be derived from the marks of it which he has impressed upon our minds and natures, how should we grope after duty, and waver when we seemed to have reached it: but the written Word is a fixed light; it is a law not *ambiguous*, not *temporary*, not *obscure*, not *hard* to be applied, not *difficult* of access. Its essence is as immortal as the existence of God and his creatures.

And this performance of God's statutes, towards which the godly man inclines his heart, is to be *perpetual*. The word *always* in the text points to a contrast between a life of steady

piety and a temporary as well as a fitful or periodical religion.

In the first place, the word implies something which is not a temporary religion. I am aware that the text does not declare the heart to be *always inclined to obedience*, but only affirms that, at the time when the Psalmist expressed his feelings, he was *inclined to be always obedient*. At another time, therefore, it might be said, he could, notwithstanding the feelings now expressed, be inclined in the opposite direction, and these changes might be passed through several successive times. There is indeed no impossibility, either in such veering and shifting of the affections, or in the final extinction of pious feeling, followed by a state of hopeless spiritual death. But still the tendency of the renewed nature is to be uniform and unwavering, like the truth on which it feeds and the Spirit which gives it life. The bent of the affections, too, is the immediate cause, in the hand of the Spirit, of obedience; and obedience reacts to add vigor to the affections. Perpetuity, then, is the law of Christian life; and that state of the affections at any one time, which secures the performance of the statutes, is the evidence that such a law is reigning in the soul. The apostle recognizes this law when he says, "if they had been of us, they would have continued with us."

A temporary religion, then, is a religion without a root, which derives no nourishment from the Divine Word through the heart, but is sustained, while it continues, by something which is consistent with the reigning power of sin. It may be built upon hopes, and may have the form of a conversion for the groundwork of those hopes; and may look to God with joy and thankfulness as the author of the pleasant feelings which it entertains; and may cherish some kind of sympathy towards the people of God; and besides influencing the feelings, may exert some slight power over the temper and moral character. But in a little time, when the fire has gone out which made such a blaze, and the life has left the tree which seemed so fair, the worthless nature of such religion is manifest to all men; for all men of a sound mind estimate the value of religious character by the faithful performance of the statutes; and argue, from the short-lived existence of such religion, that it was not of the true kind.

The characteristic of piety contained in the text is equally oppose to *periodical religion*. And here we do not mean to condemn that kind of godly life, which at intervals takes a start and shows a new power of growth; which, having moved along for some time nearly on a level, ascends at once to a higher level, and afterwards to still a higher. It may be that *this* is the law of Christian improvement; that the religious life is to be compared, not so much to a uniform ascent, as to a series of ad-

vances; that the Spirit, present in greater power at one time than another with the individual as with the Church, accomplishes his work by a succession of impulses, which constitute epochs long to be remembered. But this is far from what we intended by periodical religion; this is *so far* from implying suspension of religious life or retrogradation, that every change is for the better, and steady, perpetual vigor is insured and not obstructed. What we intend is the opposite of all this: it is a kind of life which, for the greater part of the year, or for a longer period, exhibits little difference between the professor of religion and the mere man of the world in regard to the principles on which daily business is conducted, or in regard to the interest felt for the truths and duties of religion. During this long winter of deadness, you would not know him to have any vitality; and instead of inclining his heart to perform the statutes always, he has no appearance of having a heart at all. By-and-by, however, the community where he lives is powerfully affected by convictions of the reality of Divine Truth; the true followers of Christ seize the occasion to rise to a higher standard of feeling and of duty; and he, like dead timber on the water, is borne along with the current, or like a body brought within the galvanic circuit, moves and acts as if some real vital power had been infused into him. His actings, however, are the copy and the effect of what he sees around him. But this galvanized life, having no higher source than sympathy and alarm, has no independence, and must cease as soon as circumstances change. Whenever the life of the true Christians around him is a little more hidden in its manifestations, influencing the whole sum of the actions more and the feelings less, it ceases to arouse any sympathetic feeling in him. He dies down again; he goes back to the same point of worldliness as before. Perhaps the process is repeated several times over, so that the amount of his religion consists in brief periods of pretended life, in which he reflects and apes the feelings of Christians, followed by a death, frozen and insensible as a Greenland winter. It is needless to say, that such a man is very far from the character described in the text of him who inclines his heart to perform the statutes always.

We are now arrived at the last words of this verse, in which the Psalmist declares, that his resolution to perform the statutes of God reaches *to the end*. It is impossible that a sincerely religious man should prescribe any limit to himself beyond which his obedience should cease. The inclination of the heart towards God, which is true, is essentially general and absolute, and must therefore resolve upon universal and never ending obedience. I say this is involved in *its very nature*, for it is dictated by a perception of the rights of God, which are as last-

ing as his existence ; by a perception of the beauty of holiness, which is unchangeable ; and by a perception of the nature of happiness, which associates it for ever with the service of God. There is no reason for obedience which will not be conclusive for entire obedience throughout eternity. Thus the least control of religious affections in the heart excludes all limit of time. And when the soul has tasted the sweetness of a life of piety, its own highest happiness now is a new motive in favor of pursuing such a life unto the end. What can prevent it from being thus inclined, when its highest joy and highest duty coincide ; when the course which it chose, under less pressure of motives, is found to be more inviting, and no circumstances can exist to make it otherwise ?

Thus we see that sincere purposes of obedience are as far as possible from being temporary expedients, or mere experiments after happiness. They have something eternal about them. Although, when first aroused by Divine grace in the mind, they have the nature of winged thoughts, yet there is an alliance between the soul which conceives them and the everlasting God. They aim at nothing less than a permanent union with God, the source of good ; they soar above all condition, above all time. There shall come an end to all else that is earthly, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

And not only does the godly man incline his heart to obedience which is without end, but such obedience is secured, under grace, by such resolutions. In themselves they have a tendency towards permanence ; and they grow in strength, becoming habits of the religious life. Nor is it to be doubted that the Divine Spirit works through them to secure the endless growth of the seed which he planted in the soul.

And this inclination of heart, of which the Psalmist speaks, is not to find its termination at the end of this earthly existence. The closing words of the text, "*even unto the end,*" only serve to strengthen the word translated *always* ; yet they might suggest, to an English reader, that the end of life was thought of as the limit of time when the performance of the statutes would necessarily cease. And indeed, at that limit, many of the duties of life, arising out of our bodily constitution and social relations, must cease ; and a revolution of being will be ushered in, of which we know thus much, that the service of God will not be suspended. But, as the Christian looks forward to this change, his heart's inclination to obedience finds here no end ; but whatever else he shall leave behind him when he shall lay aside the body, this inclination of heart to the statutes of God is felt by him to be inseparable from himself. Whatever the flood of death, as it rises over his soul, shall sweep away,—supposing, even, that an utter forgetfulness of earthly scenes shall ensue,

so that he shall awake again as a new-born infant in the heavenly state,—yet *this* shall not be swept away—this undecaying principle of allegiance to his God, which is now a part of his immortal nature. He knows not what new sphere he shall move in, what new obligations shall be put upon him, what new statutes of the celestial polity shall supersede those of the earthly, which are to vanish away; yet he has confidence enough in God to know that the great Law-giver will command nothing which is not wise and right, or which is not conducive to his subjects' blessedness; and therefore, he is prepared with a free inclination of heart to welcome the constitution of God's kingdom of eternity, whatever it shall be. Here, then, we approach the full meaning of the words, "*always, even unto the end.*" And here we see the nobleness of the principle of true godliness, which, after a willing performance of God's statutes on earth, begins with new energy its career of obedience in eternity, compared with that other principle, which even for a little time on earth showed no really good effect on the life, but, in the hour when obedience was tested, gave up the soul to the power of sin.

I cannot forbear calling the attention of my hearers, as I close my discourse, to the great wisdom of the representations, which are made in the text and elsewhere in the Scriptures, of the religious character. I refer to the union in one definition of religious feeling and religious obedience—of the love of God and the actual observance of his statutes. There have been many attempts made in this world to unite the soul to God merely by religious contemplation, or religious emotion. The soul of many a mystic has been filled with lofty thoughts of God; and as he grew familiar with the beauty of the Divine countenance, and excluded the images of grosser things from within him, he became satisfied with himself, and felt a kind of superiority to those men of baser mould, involved in the works of life, whose souls had not been raised to the height of such contemplations. And yet multitudes of these men of work would do more for their friends, more for their country, more for mankind than he: his end is reached if he can enjoy elevating contemplation, but he derives from it no motive to quicken him to duty. To him God is only as a painting, or an image exquisitely wrought. He gazes and admires, but no obedience follows. His definition of religion includes only the beauty of the Divine perfections, as held before the mind.

And so the religious sentimentalist, whose taste is gratified as he beholds God's skill in nature, and whose love is awakened as he reflects upon his goodness and mercy, who thinks that *he* certainly cannot be counted among the irreligious,—he too fails, most grievously, in not linking together these pleasing views of

God with actual obedience. The two are divorced from one another in his soul, so that many a poor ignorant Christian, without refinement or native sensibility, will stand up at the judgment day, and shame him by works of love and of mercy for which he felt no promptings.

On the other hand, the formalist occupies exclusively the practical department of religion. He has no belief that unsubstantial sentiment or meditations on Divine beauty can procure heaven. Something must be done to obtain the Divine favor. He must deny himself, must mortify himself, must surpass others in doing works of beneficence, in punctuality of devotion—in the drill of religion. As for inclination of heart, and a glad consent of his inner man to the service of God, alas! he knows nothing of it. There must be some feeling of the burdensomeness of obedience in order to suggest to him that it is meritorious.

How partial and one-sided do these false kinds of *religiousness* appear, when placed by the side of the comprehensive, soul and life-embracing religion of Christ. Let that be but once implanted within the man, and now there is no longer a want of concord between his emotions and his actions; but his whole life in the feelings and the deeds plays a harmonious tune, the strain of which ends in God. And the reason of this is, that while the mystic thinks perfection attainable by contemplation; and the sentimental religionist, by warming natural reverence and admiration of God into love; and the formalist thinks, either that the external action is the all-important part, or else that it will awaken and improve the somewhat imperfect inward principle; the truly godly man begins his religious life with acknowledging the corruption of his heart, and bewailing his past alienation, and returning to allegiance in the way prescribed by the gospel. Then, when an inclination of heart is actually commenced, it is as natural to perform the statutes as it is to live. But the prescriptions of natural religion and of unhumiliated human nature for curing the disease of the soul, are made on the principle that a slight change is necessary, that it is a thing not needing an inward cure to be right in the sight of God. The Scriptures, by uniting in one definition the religion of the heart with that of the life, not only make each a test of the genuineness of the other, and show that true religion controls the whole nature; but also, by representing it to be a deep and governing principle, lead to the conviction that only a renewed nature can possess it, that it must be produced and maintained by a life-giving Spirit.

SERMON DXLIX.

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THE LITTLE LEAVEN.

"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."—GALATIANS 2: 9.

THIS seems to have been one of Paul's common sayings, or proverbs; as we find him using it on different occasions, in the same words. The word *leaven* is used by the apostle in every instance, I think, in a *bad sense*; or it is used figuratively to denote a *bad thing*. In the text, it has reference to a particular error in point of *doctrine*. In other cases, it denotes error in *practice*. Thus the apostle speaks, in one place, of "the leaven of malice and wickedness."

It is proposed to consider the maxim under consideration in both these points of view. I shall endeavor to show, in respect both to *doctrine* and *practice*, that apparently slight deviations are eminently hazardous; that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

First, let us consider the truth of this maxim in respect to *doctrine*. The particular case which the apostle had in view, when he penned the declaration in the text, is highly instructive. It was that of the Judaizing teachers. Their error consisted not so much in practising circumcision and the Jewish law, as in *insisting* upon these things as essential to salvation. "Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law of Moses, or ye cannot be saved." This was substituting circumcision and the Jewish law, in place of the blood of Christ, as the foundation of the sinner's hope, and the ground of his justification. This, therefore, was an *error*; but it was a single error, and in the estimation of many at that day, a trivial one, if one at all. But Paul thought differently. He saw clearly the nature of the error in question, and to what it must lead. He predicted that the little leaven, if suffered to remain, would leaven the entire lump; and so it proved. In their zeal for circumcision and the Jewish law, these Judaizers set aside at once the atonement of Christ, and the kindred doctrine of justification by faith. They were led also to deny the divinity of Christ, and held him to be no greater than Moses. And because Paul opposed them in their errors, they proceeded to deny the apostleship of Paul, and to reject his Epistles, as constituting any part of the sacred

Word. In short, they went on, from one thing to another, till in the course of a few years they were separated from the Church, and fell into a state of irretrievable apostasy.

Another case, going to illustrate the same principle, occurred almost in the apostolic age. It was that of the *Gnostic teachers*. The prime error of the Gnostics was a philosophical one. It grew out of their too eager inquiries respecting the origin of evil. Knowing no other cause of evil, they were led to ascribe it to the influence of *matter*. Matter, they said, is the source and the centre of all evil and of all vice. Now, admitting this philosophical speculation to be an error, most people, perhaps, would say, there can be no harm in it. What danger in believing matter to be essentially evil and corrupting, and in tracing our moral corruptions to such a source? But listen for a moment to some of the inferences which these ancient Gnostics drew from this fundamental maxim of their philosophy. If matter is essentially evil and corrupting, then God can have had no hand in creating this material world. Such a supposition would be infinitely degrading to him. This world must have been the work of some inferior and malignant demon. Again, as matter is the source of all evil, God cannot be the author of our material bodies. The body is the cruel prison and corrupter of the soul, with which some hateful spirit has invested it, and from which it becomes us to rid our souls as far and as fast as possible. Hence that "neglecting of the body," of which Paul speaks, and those dreadful austerities which many in ancient times were led to practise, for the subduing of the flesh. Again, the Gnostics said, if matter is evil, and the source of all evil, then, when Christians and other devout men have once laid aside their material bodies, they will never have them more. There will be no resurrection of the body. There will be no other than a moral, spiritual resurrection, and with good men that is past already. Those who denied the resurrection in the days of Paul, and against whom he argued in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, (chap. 15,) were undoubtedly of the Gnostic class.

But the Gnostics, or a portion of them, pursued their reasonings still farther. If matter is so essentially evil and corrupting, then our blessed Saviour cannot have had a material body. He *seemed* to have one. He *appeared* to eat and drink, and walk about here on the earth, and suffer and die like other men; but it was all an illusion. He was a mere spectre—an apparition—a spirit, but not a body. It was the inculcation of this error which led the apostle John to insist that he had not only seen but "*handled the Word of Life*;" that Jesus Christ had come *in the flesh*; and that those were very Antichrist who denied it. (1 John 4: 2, 3.)

I have noticed but a few of the perverse inferences which the early Gnostics—and more especially those who had some respect for Christianity—were accustomed to draw from their prime error as to the evil and corrupting nature and tendencies of matter. Enough has been said, however, to show how this one error worked in their minds, and led them along to a perversion and corruption of the entire gospel. It proved with them, as with the Judaizers, that a little leaven leavened the whole lump.

Instances illustrative of the same point are constantly occurring in our own times. Take the case of an individual who is first led to doubt, and then to deny, the proper divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He may think this, at the time, a small departure from the common faith, and one attended with little or no danger. "Of what importance is it," he says, "so long as I hold to the divine mission of Christ, and receive his instructions, whether I believe or not in the proper divinity of his person?" But the results of a few years almost invariably show that the question is one of very great importance. For, having rejected the divinity of Christ, the individual supposed will, if consistent, reject the atonement; since none but a divine person can have made an atonement sufficient for a guilty world. And having discarded the idea of a divine Saviour, and of atonement by his death, our inquirer will proceed on to a denial of the connected doctrines of depravity, of regeneration, of justification by faith, and of all that is essential in evangelical religion.

The late Dr. Priestley was a student in theology under good Dr. Doddridge, and commenced his ministry, as he tells us, a moderate Calvinist. He entered upon his downward career, by denying the proper divinity of Christ. He was first an Arian, then a Socinian, and then a Materialist and Universalist. He then denied the inspiration of the Scriptures, and closed his life in a state of almost infidelity.

Nor is his a peculiar case. Hundreds and thousands have passed through substantially the same experience. Nor would the case be different, supposing a person to commence his wanderings from some other point besides that of the divinity of Christ. Suppose him to commence, if you will, with a rejection of the doctrine of the entire sinfulness of the natural, unrenewed man. The race, he thinks, is not fallen so low. We should not take such humbling, degrading views of human nature.

Starting from this point, our inquirer is next led to doubt, perhaps, respecting the character and work of the Saviour, and the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit. "I do not feel that I am fallen low enough to need an almighty Saviour, and an almighty

Sanctifier, and I cannot believe that any such provision has ever been made for me."

Having rejected the doctrine of depravity, the individual supposed denies, of course, the kindred doctrine of *regeneration*. The most that men need is *reformation*, not regeneration; to have their characters improved and amended, but not to be born again. And without the doctrines of depravity and regeneration, he cannot hold to any radical distinction between the righteous and the wicked in the present life. "There are differences, indeed, in the characters of men; some are much better than others. But all have some good in them, and there is no radical difference or distinction between the righteous and the wicked." And if there are no radical distinctions among men in this life, the next inference is, that there will be none hereafter. "All may not be equally happy in the future life, but certainly none will be for ever miserable. The eternal burnings of which we hear are a mere bugbear."

Having descended to this point, the individual supposed has but another step to take, and if he is a consistent man, he will certainly take it. He will reject the divine authority of the Scriptures, and settle down in cold and cheerless infidelity. For when he looks into his Bible, he finds all those doctrines which one after another he has discarded, clearly there. They are in the Bible, and by no dint of honest interpretation can they be got out of it. And it only remains to reject the whole together, to put out the light of revealed truth, and commence sailing across the troubled sea of life, and the dark waters of death, and into the dread ocean of the future, with naught to direct him but the glimmering rays of misguided and perverted reason.

Instances like those here supposed might be multiplied to any extent, and these taken, not from fancy, but from real life. The history of the Church, from the beginning downwards, is filled up with such cases; strewed all the way with the wrecks of individuals who, having wandered from the path of truth, have found afterwards no resting-place. They have continued to wander more and more, till the whole mind has become corrupted, and the little leaven has leavened the whole lump.

And it is easy to account for these disastrous results, from the natural workings of error, and from the principles and operations of the human mind. Let a person get away from the Bible, and fall into error on almost any point of religious doctrine, and (if he has an active, inquisitive mind) the imbibed error will *diffuse itself*. It will not lie in the mind alone. It is inconsistent with whatever of truth there is in that mind, and to make room for it, this truth will be gradually displaced. The one error will ere long become two, and the two three,

and the three four, and so on, till the whole mind is disordered, and faith and a good conscience are shipwrecked together.

I have thus far illustrated the apostle's maxim in the text, in its relation to Christian *doctrine*. We are to consider it, secondly, with regard to *practice*; or (which is the same) in regard to defects in moral and Christian *character*. It may be shown that in respect to character, as well as doctrine, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

It is so with strictly *religious* character. Fatal declensions in religion are not ordinarily accomplished at once. The fearful descent is not passed over at a bound. The first step in the declension is probably slight—scarcely perceptible. The next is greater, and the next greater, till Christian character is at length forfeited, and hope is gone. A young Christian—a recent convert—a recent professor of religion—with high hopes and animating prospects, begins, it may be, to neglect partially his secret devotions. His closet duties are from time to time omitted. Next, he is found to neglect the stated meetings of the church. Next, the company and conversation of Christians are shunned, and the company of the ungodly is frequented. Next, you hear of him as mingling in some scene of sinful pleasure and amusement; and it is not long, ordinarily, before this man can swear with the profane, and drink with the drunken, and laugh at the censures of the church, and set his brethren at defiance.* How often has all this been acted over in the evangelical churches of our own country! How often, alas! have my own eyes seen it, and wept over it in secret places!

And the same course of things is commonly observed, in respect to mere *moral* character. No one commences life with habits of confirmed vice. This is not possible. Nor are such habits fastened upon a person by a single act. The progress of degradation and ruin is gradual. It is at first a little leaven; but if suffered to remain and operate, it leaveneth the whole lump.

Here is a young man, we will suppose, who is vain of his person, and naturally fond of dress and show. This is his ruling passion, his easily besetting sin. As he has not the honest means of gratifying this unholy desire, he resorts to such as are disreputable—dishonest. He descends to deceit and fraud, and it may be to secret and petty larceny; and when his crime is suspected, he lies to conceal it; and if one lie will not answer his purpose, he lies again. By this time, his conscience has

* The apostle John has reference to cases such as this, when he says: "They went out from us, because they were not of us." &c. 1 John 19.

lost its power over him ; his moral principle is well nigh gone ; and he is prepared for any thing. He stops at nothing for which he has a strong temptation.

We may suppose the case of an older man—one who has entered on the active business of life. *His* passion is for wealth. He has an unconquerable desire to be rich. He sets out with the intention to be honest and honorable in all his dealings, but *he will be rich*, and so—trusting to his good fortune, and hoping for a favorable issue—he branches out into business beyond his means. His error, at the first, is simply one of imprudence, perhaps, but it soon runs him into grosser sins. To accomplish his plans, he has occasion for more money than he can get honestly, and what shall he do ? Shall he suffer defeat ? Shall he incur a failure ? Or shall he descend to dishonesty and wickedness ? Shall he put another man's name to a little piece of paper ; or cheat an honest, unsuspecting creditor ; or obtain goods on false pretenses ? The temptation is too strong for him, and he yields to it ; and from the moment of his yielding, he enters on a downward path, from which there is no return. He flounders on ; he plunges along from bad to worse, till at length property, character, comfort, and perhaps life, are all sacrificed together. He learns, in his own terrible experience, the truth of one of Paul's assertions : "They that *will* be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." He learns the truth of another of Paul's maxims : "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

Less than a hundred years ago, there lived in England a clergyman of the Established Church, whose name was William Dodd. He was a popular writer and preacher, was settled in London, became one of the King's chaplains, and obtained other valuable preferments. But he was vain and extravagant, fond of show and popularity, and though his income (for a clergyman) was great, his expenses were greater. He became embarrassed, and to relieve himself from difficulty forged a draught on his friend and former pupil, the Earl of Chesterfield. He was soon detected and convicted ; and as forgery was then a capital crime in England, he was publicly executed, in the year 1777. We have here a terrible example, in high life, of the truth I am endeavoring to impress upon you. You here see how sins not regarded as disreputable at first, and thought perhaps to be trivial, lead their unhappy victim along, till he perpetrates an act for which there is no reprieve ; till he (in the full sense of the apostle) drowns himself in destruction and perdition.

The Scriptures abound with like examples, all going to show the downward tendency of sin, and the certainty of its issues in

ruin and in death. Take the case of the first murderer, Cain. He began with envying his brother; then he quarrelled with him; then he slew him. David's fall commenced in the indulgence of lascivious desires. These led him into adultery; and in the hope of concealing his sin and shame, he plotted and perpetrated murder. Solomon—in accordance with oriental custom, but in disobedience to the express command of God—surrounded himself with outlandish women. He thought there was little harm or danger in what he was doing, but the event (as might have been expected) was most disastrous. To show his liberality, and at the same time to gratify his heathen wives, he must set up heathen temples in Jerusalem. "He built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab; and for Moloch, the abomination of the children of Ammon; and likewise did he for all his strange wives, who sacrificed and burned incense to their gods." And what was the consequence? The Lord, we are told, "was *angry with Solomon*, because his heart was turned away from the God of Israel;" and from this period we trace all the subsequent afflictions of his house.

The selling of his Master for thirty pieces of silver was not the first sin of Judas Iscariot. He could not have committed such a crime, without much previous training and preparation. Judas seems to have been an ardent lover of money, and to have had some skill and tact in the use of it. It was on this account, perhaps, that he became a sort of treasurer or commissary for the apostles, carrying the bag, and receiving whatsoever was put therein; and it came out afterwards that he was in the constant habit of purloining from that bag. He took, as he had occasion, the property of the company, and used it for his own private purposes. By the continual indulgence of his thievish propensities, the heart of Judas became dreadfully hardened, his avarice and covetousness were confirmed, and he was prepared at length to perpetrate a deed unparalleled in the annals of human wickedness; a deed which will not only blacken his name, but consume and damn his soul for ever. "Good were it for that man if he had never been born."

In all these instances, we see illustrated the one great principle of the text, viz.: *progress in wickedness*. Little sins prepare the way for those which are greater, and these for others which are greater still, till a depth of iniquity is reached from which there is no return; till the character and the soul are entirely ruined. It is commonly said, that one lie draws ten more after it. With about an equal propriety, the same may be said of all other sins. Every act of wickedness may be expected to draw ten more after it; and each of these ten may be expected to draw ten more; and thus the transgressor goes on (unless

Divine grace interpose to arrest him) multiplying and accumulating his transgressions, until iniquity proves his ruin.

We do not commonly see any great, enormous sin standing out upon the character of a man alone. Perhaps we never do. Others of a less flagrant character go before it, and prepare the way for it. Sins grow upon the characters of men, not alone, but in clusters, or rather they follow each other in continuous trains, the beginnings of which are comparatively slight, but the end of which, in every case, (unless averted by sovereign grace,) is destruction and perdition. "The little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

The subject suggests some important counsels, with which I close. And, 1. Let us all beware of seemingly slight aberrations from the *faith* of the gospel. No one can doubt that the Bible inculcates a system of religious truth, and no one of *us* ought to doubt as to what this system of truth may be. It was clearly taught by the apostles and their immediate successors. It was as clearly taught by the Reformers of the sixteenth century, and is embodied in their published confessions of faith. It is held now for substance, and in much the same sense, by pious evangelical Christians, all over the world. We have the means, then, of knowing what the faith of the gospel is; and let all who hear me beware of seemingly slight aberrations from it. We are not in danger of departing at once, and *entirely*, from the faith of the gospel; of becoming downright heretics and infidels at a bound. But we are in danger of relinquishing something of "the form of sound words;" of substituting some error in the place of some truth which God has revealed; and of feeling that so slight a deviation from the established faith cannot be a matter of much importance. But be it remembered, that great and destructive heresies have *always* begun with apparently slight deviations from the established faith. And be it further remembered, that the worst heretics have commonly pretended, at the first, that their deviations were but slight,—too slight to demand either notice or censure. So it was with the Gnostics in the second and third centuries. So it was with the Arians in the fourth century. So it was with the Pelagians in the fifth century. So it was with the Arminians in the seventeenth century; and so it has been with the Unitarians of modern times. When Unitarianism first showed itself in this country, the constant pretense was, that it was a very small innovation,—too small to be made the subject of controversy, or to occasion any division or separation among Christians. And yet to what has it grown! And to what, unless renounced, is it destined to grow, but to an entire subversion of the gospel?

The truth is, as I have before said, that a little error, once admitted into the mind, will not lie alone there. It will work and

make room for itself; and not for itself only, but for other connected errors; and these will come in and make room for others; and so the work of depravation will go on, till the whole mind becomes corrupted, and the faith of the gospel is entirely displaced. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

Let us beware then, I repeat, of the little leaven. Let us beware of seemingly slight aberrations from the truth. Let us "hold fast the form of sound words which we have received." Let us understand "the faith once delivered to the saints," and contend earnestly for it, and let no part of it be flattered or wrested from us; knowing that the beginnings of error, like the beginnings of strife, are as when one letteth out water; first a rill, then a river, then a roaring and resistless torrent.

2. Let us beware of seemingly slight departures from the ways of holiness and virtue. Great and fatal declensions commence, as we have seen, in the indulgence of little sins. This is true of *spiritual* declensions, and it is equally true of *moral* declensions. No one ever ruined himself, spiritually or morally, by one single, outrageous act of wickedness. No one ever commits such an act, till he has been through a process of preparation for it. Those who now hear me are not in great danger, I trust, of becoming thieves and murderers and adulterers at once; but we are all in danger of sliding into courses of sinful indulgence, which shall lead us insensibly along to the perpetration of the most outrageous wickedness,—any thing, to which we may have a strong temptation.

I repeat then, let us beware of seemingly slight departures from the ways of holiness and virtue. Let us beware of the sinful thought and the sinful desire, which, if indulged, will soon ripen into the sinful purpose. Let us beware of what are sometimes (though improperly) called little sins. It is these little foxes that spoil the vines. It is these little sins, as they are called, to which we shall be most strongly tempted. It is these into which we shall be the most likely to fall. These are the snares which the great adversary of the soul has most cunningly laid for us. If we escape these, we shall probably escape the rest. If, by Divine grace, we resist and overcome these, we may hope to go on, in a straight and sure path, to the end of our pilgrimage, and the consummation of our hopes.

Finally, it becomes those who are already entangled in the meshes of sin, to make their escape without delay; and this is, more or less, the case with us all. It is especially the case with the impenitent, unconverted part of this assembly. Such are not to regard themselves as already pure—having nothing to do but to preserve themselves in a state of moral purity. But you are already *sinners*—entangled in the fatal net; and the question of greatest interest to you is, *How shall we get out of it?* And

on this point, as you know, the gospel authorizes but a single answer: "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Go on as you are, my impenitent hearers, and your ruin is certain. Parley, and delay, and daub with untempered mortar, and satisfy yourselves with slight and insufficient remedies, and your ruin is certain. Your only safety is to turn right about, forsake the destructive paths of sin, enter the strait gate, and keep the narrow way of life; and though it may lead you over hills of difficulty, and amid scenes of trial, and through the dark valley of the shadow of death, it will surely bring you to a glorious end. It will lead you up to those heavenly hills, where Jesus has gone, and is waiting for you. Having finally overcome, you shall be permitted to sit with him on his throne, as he has overcome, and is seated on his Father's throne.

A CHRISTIAN.

A CHRISTIAN is born of God, engrafted into Christ, and a habitation for the Holy Spirit. His nature is renewed, his mind illuminated, his spirit changed. He is not what he was, for grace hath made a difference; he is not what he desires to be, for grace is not yet perfected; he is not what he shall be, for grace shall be consummated in glory. The knowledge of Christ is his treasury; the mind of Christ his evidence; the love of Christ his song; conformity to Christ his life; to be with Christ his pre-eminent desire. By faith he rests on Christ, receives Christ, and looks to Christ. He hears Christ's words, treads in Christ's steps, and seeks Christ's approbation. He speaks the language of Christ's kingdom, reveres Christ's laws, obeys his ordinances, wears his costume, and lives to his glory. The life of Christ within him is the principle of his being; and because Christ lives, he shall live also. In the Christian, Christ lives and speaks and acts. He is Christ's representative on earth, his witness before men, and his follower before God. The Christian hearkens to Christ's teachings, rests on Christ's sacrifice, avails himself of Christ's mediation, and cheerfully obeys Christ's laws. He inquires, What would Christ have me know, what do, and what enjoy? To know Christ, is Christianity intellectual; to obey Christ, Christianity practical; to enjoy Christ, Christianity experimental; and to be like Christ, Christianity perfected. As bread to the hungry, as water to the thirsty, as the rock in the sultry day, is Christ to the Christian.

The Christian is in the world, but not of it; among the world, but yet separate from it; passing through the world, without attachment to it. The idolater boasts in his idols, the Mahometan in his false prophet, and the Romanist in the Virgin Mary; but the Christian glories only in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian is a man, and may err; an imperfect man, and may sin; but a renewed man, and shall have his fruit unto life eternal. The Christian is a warrior, and must fight; but he is a conqueror, and must prevail. The Christian sojourns on earth, but dwells in heaven; he is a pilgrim in the desert, but an enrolled denizen of the skies. The Christian is the impress of Christ, the reflection of the Father, and the temple of the Holy Ghost. Contrast him with the infidel in his faith; with the profligate in his life; with the merely moral man in his heart, and with the Pharisee in his spirit. His pedigree is from Jehovah, his nature from heaven, and his name from Antioch. O Christian! great is thy dignity, refulgent is thy glory, interminable thy blessed hope. All things are thine; thou art Christ's, and Christ is God's.

ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

IF so, you are clothed with humility; you have a deep and habitual sense of your sinfulness; you abhor yourself for your forgetfulness of God, ingratitude, pride of heart, unworthy indulgences of appetite and passion, and a thousand failures in duty, known only to God and yourself: "Behold, I am vile!" is the frequent language of your lips, and the pervading sentiment of your heart; though you dwell little on the infirmities and sins of which you are conscious, in conversation with others, they are constantly before your eyes, and constrain you to lie low, infinitely low before God, and heartily to acknowledge your desert of all the wrath denounced against the sinner, and that "on grace alone your hope relies."

If so, you forget the things that are behind; such as the convictions of sin, righteousness, and judgment you once felt; the apparent change of moral feeling to which you attained; and the obedience you thought to render to the Divine command; and you look to the things that are *before*, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God: not that you never recall the day of your hopeful espousals, nor remember the loving-kindness of the Lord in the hours of darkness, nor speak of what he hath done for your soul, in praise of his

mercy; for to all this you are invited and bound; but your oft-violated vows will rise before you, your daily repentings and sinnings, your strong resolutions and inexcusable failures, will upbraid you, and mock your aspirings for assured hope, unless they drive you to renewed actings of faith, and the fresh dedication of your all to God, in sole dependence on that grace which saveth to the uttermost. Past experience will comfort you no further than it is sustained by present devotedness and earnest effort for perfect conformity to God.

If so, you are actively employed for Christ; you love his service; it is your meat and drink to do his will; to glorify and enjoy God is the highest end of your being; you have your own salvation in view, and work it out with fear and trembling; you have your eye open on the salvation of your family and your neighbors; you defend the truth of God when it is assailed, and vindicate his honor from the aspersions of his enemies; to do all this, you search the Scriptures, commune with God in your closet, exemplify religion in your daily conversation, attend diligently on the means of grace, and persuade others neither to neglect the Bible, nor condemn the ordinances of God, nor walk in the way of the ungodly, nor sit in the seat of the scornful; you neglect none of the ordinary duties of life, but provide conscientiously for your family, and promptly meet the claims of society, and in all things aim to keep a conscience void of offense.

If so, you love the prosperity of Zion and pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Christ's errand into the world was to save it; if you are Christ's, you have the same mind that was in him, and not only rejoice in all the triumphs of the cross, but labor to multiply and extend them. Millions are in the way to perdition; they are still within the reach of prayer, and the arm that is mighty to save. God has commissioned you to be laborers together with him in saving them; and, if faithful in executing the commission, his grace will be found sufficient for you in life, in death, in eternity. If these things be so, the question is settled; you are a Christian.—*Congregationalist*.

THE GOSPEL INVITATION.

"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."—JOHN 6: 37.

IN no wise! How broad is the door of welcome! "God," says a holy writer, "is like one on his knees, with tears in his eyes and extreme fervor in his soul, beseeching the sinner to

be saved." He met the prodigal son half way. Ere the ungrateful wanderer could stammer forth, through penitential tears, the confession of his sins, the arms of mercy were around him. The prodigal thought of no more than the menial's place; the father had in readiness the best robe and the fatted calf. "There is no such argument," says Bishop Reynolds, "for our turning to God, as his turning to us." He has the first word in the overtures of mercy. He refuses none, he welcomes all; the poor, the wretched, the blind, the naked, the burdened, the heavy-laden; the hardened sinner, the aged sinner, the daring sinner, the dying sinner—all are invited to the conference: "Come now, and let us reason together." The most parched tongue, that laps the streams from the smitten rock, has everlasting life. "When we forgive, it costs us an effort; when God forgives, it is his delight." From the battlements of heaven he is calling after us: "Turn ye! turn ye! Why will ye die?" He seems to wonder if sinners have pleasure in their own death. He declares, "I have none."

My soul, hast thou yet closed with the gospel's free invitations? Have you gone, just as you are, with all the raggedness of nature's garments, standing in your own nothingness, feeling that you are insolvent, that you have "nothing to pay," already a bankrupt, and the debt always increasing? Have you taken hold of that blessed assurance, "He is able to save unto the uttermost?" Are you resting your eternal all on Him who has done all and suffered all for you; leaving you, "without money and without price," a free, full, unconditional offer of a great salvation? Say not your sins are too many, the crimson dye too deep. It is because you are a great sinner, and have great sins, that you need a great Saviour. "Of whom I am chief," is a golden postscript to the "faithful saying."

Do not dishonor God by casting doubts on his ability or willingness. If your sins are heinous, you will be all the greater monument of grace. You may be the weakest and unworthiest of vessels; but remember there was a niche in the temple for great and for small, for "vessels of cups" as well as for "vessels of flagons." Ay, and the smallest vessel glorifies Christ.

Arise, then, and call upon thy God! We cannot say, with the king of Nineveh, "Who can tell if God will turn?" He is "turning" now; importunately pleading, and averring, on his own immutable word, that he "will in no wise cast out." "Though ye have lain among the pots, ye shall be as doves, whose wings are covered with silver, and their feathers with yellow gold." Close without delay with these precious invitations, that so, looking up to a reconciled God and Father in heaven, you may even this night say, "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety."